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ABSTRACT

A classroom observation technique that describes classroom events at the level of activity and analyzes the communicative features of verbal exchanges between students and teachers within each activity is described. Activity characteristics indentified include type, participant organization, content, student modality or skills used, and materials; the communicative features observed include the use of the target language, information gap, sustained speech, reaction to code or message, incorporation of preceding utterances, discourse initiation, and relative restriction of linguistic form. Coding procedures have been developed for both the activity analysis and the exchange analysis. Preliminary data analysis from initial use of the coding technique reveals significant differences in communicative orientation between French and English second language classes at two grade levels. Additional data for different class types (core, extended, immersion, and second language French classes) are under analysis. (MSE)

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The Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching: An Observation Scheme[1]

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A striking feature of applied linguistics during the past decade has been the rapid growth of interest in classroom-oriented research. This has led to an increased awareness of the great complexity of the language teaching and learning process, together with a willingness to recognize that the second language classroom and what goes on there can be systematically investigated and need no longer be regarded as "an impenetrable *black box*" (Long 1980). The wide range of classroom-oriented research is indicated by a review of the recent literature, which includes studies of style-shifting in classroom interlanguage, cross-cultural comparisons in the use of speech acts, turn-taking behaviour of students and teachers, patterns of participation in native speaker/nonnative speaker interactions, the treatment of learners' errors, and the nature of the linguistic input provided by teachers. Classroom observation, which attempts to provide operationally defined terms which will enable us

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to conceptualize the act of teaching (Fanselow 1977), is an important aspect of this research.

The current tendency to pay closer attention to what teachers actually do in the classroom—as distinct from what linguists and psychologists say they should do—has been encouraged by the realization that vague generalized references to global language teaching methods cannot adequately describe the teaching-learning process. The tendency of much research in the past has been to view teaching as a simple concept in terms of the pedagogical methods employed. Descriptions of second language instruction have often been based on imprecise terminology such as *grammar-translation*, *audiolingual method* or, more recently, *communicative language teaching*. For example, a well-known study by Scherer and Wertheimer in the mid-sixties (1964) set out to compare students who had been taught by grammar-translation and those who had been taught audiolingually, in order to determine which method would lead to the most successful language learning. A few years later, the Pennsylvania Project (Smith 1970) attempted to determine the effects of the audiolingual approach on the second language achievement of students in a two-year secondary school program. Although these studies have valuable aspects, they remain inconclusive partly because their reference to global methods proved insufficient to distinguish between the actual practices of teachers in classrooms. The nature of the dilemma was summed up by Bialystok, Fröhlich and Howard as follows: "It is evident that the specific behaviours used by two different teachers may vary greatly even though they are implementing the same teaching program, or even presenting the same lesson. If these individual differences have significance for the teaching-learning process . . . then a general reference to overall methods or approaches is inadequate for the purposes of describing second language teaching and relating that teaching to learning outcomes" (Bialystok et al 1979:7).

A large number of observational instruments designed to describe and analyze what goes on in the classroom have emerged during the past thirty years (for overviews see Dunkin and Biddle 1974, Simon and Boyer 1974). Observation schemes may differ with respect to a great variety of features, including type and number of content categories, coding procedures, units of analysis and source of the variables, as well as the purposes for which the instruments have been designed. The vast majority of observation schemes are concerned with teacher-student interaction in classrooms where a subject other than language is taught. Such instruments may examine the classroom climate and the degree of direct or indirect teacher influence (Withall 1949, Flanders 1970); the roles of classroom participants in terms of the various *moves* they undertake and the meanings which may be expressed by each move type (Bellack et al. 1966); the cognitive level of the interaction (Davis and Tinsley 1968, Aschner et al. 1965); the nature of the classroom discourse (Forsyth 1974, Sinclair and Coulthard 1975), and a number of other factors.

The number of observation instruments designed specifically for the second language classroom, where language is not just the medium but also the object of instruction, is much smaller (for a recent review see Long 1980). One of the best known instruments is the Foreign Language Interaction Analysis System (FLINT) which was adapted from the widely used Flanders scheme and slightly extended by Moskowitz (1970, 1971). It was developed to give L2 teachers objective feedback about classroom interaction, specifically with regard to the climate established by the teacher. The system contains twelve basic categories, seven for teacher behav-

iours such as *deals with feelings, uses ideas of students, asks questions, directs pattern drills,* two for student responses (*specific response* and *open-ended or student initiated response*), and a number of other verbal and non-verbal categories. Another scheme proposed by Fanselow (1977) identifies five aspects of communication which are characteristic of classroom activity, and also of interactions outside the classroom. The basic questions asked are: *Who communicates with whom? What is the pedagogic purpose of the activity? What mediums (aural, visual, written, etc.) are used in the activity? What is the content of the message? How are the mediums used to communicate the message?* Other recent schemes (Bialystok et al. 1979, Mitchell et al. 1981, Naiman et al. 1978, Ullmann and Geva 1982) attempt to provide more detailed information about the interaction between teachers and students and propose categories designed to capture various features which are felt to be theoretically, empirically or intuitively relevant to the second language classroom.

The scheme described in this paper (COLT: Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) is being developed within the context of a five-year project looking at a number of questions related to the nature of language proficiency, and its development in educational contexts for children learning a second language (Allen et al. 1983). The research is organized around an examination of four general issues: the nature of language proficiency, the influence of social context on bilingual development, the effects of instructional variables on language, and the influence of individual learner characteristics. Our concept of proficiency is based on the hypothesis that competence is not a unitary phenomenon but involves at least three components: grammatical, discourse, and sociolinguistic (that is, knowledge of the formal systems of lexis, morphology-syntax, and phonology; knowledge of the way sentences combine into meaningful sequences; and knowledge of the ways in which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in a social context). The assumption is that learners may develop competence in any of these areas relatively independently, that learners and native speakers will differ in their relative mastery of these skills, that the skills are involved in different degrees in different language tasks, and that L2 programs may differentially affect the development of these traits.

The instructional variables selected for examination in the COLT scheme have been motivated by a desire to describe as precisely as possible some of the features of communication which occur in second language classrooms. Our concept of *communicative feature* has been derived from current theories of communicative competence, from the literature on communicative language teaching, and from a review of recent research into first and second language acquisition. The observational categories are designed (a) to capture significant features of verbal interaction in L2 classrooms, and (b) to provide a means of comparing some aspects of classroom discourse with *natural* language as it is used outside the classroom. One reason for undertaking this research was to investigate the claim that a knowledge of the formal aspects of language develops out of meaningful language use, rather than the other way around. According to Evelyn Hatch, "the basic assumption has been . . . that one first learns to manipulate structures, that one gradually builds up a repertoire . . . and then, somehow, learns to put the structures to use in discourse. We would like to consider the possibility that just the reverse happens. One learns to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed" (Hatch 1978: 404).

Although recent approaches to L2 instruction, e.g., communicative language teaching, emphasize the need for a more meaningful and natural use of language inside the classroom, there seems to have been little research aimed at indicating the precise differences, if any, in methodology and outcomes which distinguish these from more traditional approaches. Michael Canale, in a recent paper, notes "the current disarray in conceptualization, research and application in the area of communicative language pedagogy", and suggests that it "results in large part from failure to consider and develop an adequate theoretical framework" (Canale 1983). As a result of the controversy which surrounds such ill-defined concepts as *functional practice, meaningful discourse*, and *authentic language use*, we decided not to attempt a definition of communicative language teaching as a general global concept, but rather to compile a list of indicators of communicative behaviour, each of which could be separately observed and quantified. We hoped that this approach would enable us to investigate the communicative orientation of L2 classrooms, especially in those cases where two or more teachers claimed to be following different pedagogic approaches.

We found that none of the existing observation instruments could be adopted in its entirety for the purpose of our study. We therefore decided to develop our own observation scheme, which would contain categories to measure features of communication typical of classroom discourse, as well as categories to measure how closely these interaction patterns resemble the ways in which language is used in non-instructional settings.

DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE OF THE OBSERVATION SCHEME

The COLT observation scheme is divided into two parts (see Appendices 1 and 2). Part A describes classroom events at the level of activity, and Part B analyzes the communicative features of verbal exchanges between teachers and students as they occur within each activity. The decision to establish *classroom activity* as the main unit of analysis was based on the fact that this concept is familiar to teachers and constitutes the focus around which most teaching is conceived and organized. The rationale for Part B derives from the fact that the development of communicative competence is a major concern in the current language teaching literature, and constitutes one of the basic issues in the Development of Bilingual Proficiency Project of which the classroom observation studies form a part. In this section we will present a brief discussion of the main parameters of the observation scheme. The description of classroom activities will be dealt with first, followed by a presentation and discussion of the communicative features of classroom interaction proposed in this scheme.

Part A: Description of Classroom Activities

Although the concept of classroom activity is intuitively and pedagogically meaningful, a clear and unambiguous theoretical definition is not easily obtained. For this reason an operational definition containing five distinct parameters has been tentatively established. Each activity, including where appropriate the constituent subsections or episodes (cf. Mitchell, Parkinson, and Johnstone 1981), is described with reference to the five parameters, as follows:

I. Activity type
II. Participant organization
III. Content
IV. Student modality
V. Materials

Each parameter includes several subsections, some of which are hierarchically organized. They represent a combination of high and low inference categories. Although the parameters and their constituent categories are intended to serve a descriptive purpose, their selection is theoretically motivated in that they reflect current theories of communicative competence, and other issues in first and second language learning which have been influential in the development of L2 methodology. The five parameters of Part A are described below:

Activity type. The first parameter of the observation scheme is open-ended, that is, no predetermined descriptors have to be checked off by the observer. Instead, each activity is separately described: e.g. drill, translation, singing, discussion, game, dictation, roleplay, reading aloud. Frequently, activities consist of two or more episodes: e.g. (a) the teacher reads the words of a song aloud, (b) the students repeat the words after the teacher, (c) the students sing the song. These would be described as three separate episodes within one activity. The parameter *activity type* was left open so that the scheme could accommodate the wide variety of activities occurring in various L2 programs at different age levels. As the research proceeds it is possible we will find that different programs may be characterized by the predominance of specific types of activity. Should this prove to be the case we intend to develop a superordinate classification scheme which would allow the reduction of possibly hundreds of separate activities into a limited number of representative types. One possible categorization is suggested by the *formal* and *functional* distinction described by Stern (1981). Another could be based on a differentiation between *authentic* and *non-authentic* tasks (Breen 1982), authentic tasks being those which simulate real-life communicative situations.

Participant organization. This parameter describes three basic patterns of organization for classroom interactions: Is the teacher working with the whole class or not? Are the students divided into groups or are they engaged in individual seat work? If they are engaged in group work, how is it organized? The various subsections are as follows:

1. *Whole class*
   (a) Teacher to student or class, and vice versa (One central activity led by the teacher is going on; the teacher interacts with the whole class and/or with individual students).
   (b) Student to student, or student to class and vice versa (Students talk to each other, either as part of the lesson or as informal socializing; one central activity led by a student may be going on, e.g. a group of students act out a skit and the rest of the class is the audience).
   (c) Choral work by students (The whole class or groups participate in the choral work, repeating a model provided by the textbook or teacher).

2. *Group work*
   (a) Groups all work on the same task.
   (b) Groups work on different tasks.
   (Note: If possible, we indicate the number of groups and the number of students in each group. We also indicate whether the teacher or the students specify the activities and the procedures, and the extent to which the teacher monitors group work).
3. *Group and individual work*
   (a) Individual seat work (Students work on their own, all on the same task or on different tasks).
   (b) Group/individual work (Some students are involved in group work, others work on their own).

The above low-inference categories are descriptive of how the students are organized as participants in classroom interaction; however, the categories may also reflect different theoretical approaches to teaching. In the literature on communicative language teaching, for example, group work is considered to be an important factor in the development of *fluency skills*, or communicative competence (Brumfit 1981; Long, Leslie, McLean, and Castanos 1976). The reason for this claim is that highly-controlled, teacher-centered approaches are thought to impose restrictions on the growth of students' productive ability. In classes dominated by the teacher, students spend most of their time responding to questions and rarely initiate speech. Moreover, student talk in teacher-centered classrooms is frequently limited to the production of isolated sentences which are assessed for their grammatical accuracy rather than for their communicative appropriateness or value. Because the emphasis in group interactions is more likely to be on the expression of meaning, and less likely to be on the linguistic accuracy of utterances, classes which can be shown to provide more group activities may affect the L2 development of learners in ways which are different from those that represent a teacher-centered *lock-step* approach to instruction.

Content. The *content* parameter describes the subject-matter of the activities; that is, what the teacher and the students are talking, reading, or writing about or what they are listening to. Three major content areas have been differentiated: Management, Language, and Other Topics. The rationale for these categories arises from current discussions of theoretical issues in first and second language acquisition, including theories of communicative competence, and also from a number of practical pedagogic concerns. The content categories are as follows:

1. *Management*
   (a) Classroom procedures
   (b) Disciplinary routines
2. *Explicit focus on language*
   (a) Form
   (b) Function
   (c) Discourse
   (d) Sociolinguistics
3. *Other topics*
   (a) Narrow range of reference

(b) Limited range of reference
(c) Broad range of reference

4. *Topic control*
   (a) Control by teacher
   (b) Control shared by teacher and student
   (c) Control by student

The first content category, *Management*, has been separated from the other content areas because it does not fall within the range of planned curriculum content, but arises from the needs of the classroom situation. Management exchanges are of particular interest in L2 learning because they often include examples of spontaneous communication within the context of an otherwise grammatically-oriented classroom (Brumfit 1976, Long 1983). Management also relates to authentic communication in that the giving and receiving of directives of a procedural or disciplinary nature represents an aspect of language use which is very common in the *real world* outside the classroom.

The content areas *Language* and *Other Topics* reflect the distinction between first language acquisition in natural settings, and second language learning in the classroom. It has been repeatedly shown that in interactions with children acquiring their first language the focus is on the message being conveyed, and that the vast majority of corrections by caretakers refer to violations of meaning rather than of form (see Snow and Ferguson 1977 for a discussion of this issue). The focus in the L2 classroom, however, has typically been on the presentation of the language code and on the correction of formal errors, especially in programs based on the grammar-translation or the audiolingual approaches. In view of the often limited success of more traditional methods of L2 teaching and the claim that the process of L2 learning is in many ways similar to that of first language acquisition (Corder 1971, Richards 1973), it has been argued that L2 teaching methods should attempt to approximate the conditions under which young children learn their first language. The question of whether the primary focus of instruction should be on meaning or on code is one of the crucial issues in this debate.

Explicit focus on language and *Other topics* are both divided into several subsections. With regard to explicit focus on language, *form* refers to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, *function* to illocutionary acts such as requesting, apologizing, and explaining, *discourse* to the way sentences combine into cohesive and coherent sequences, and *sociolinguistics* to the features of utterances which make them appropriate to particular social contexts. These four categories have been derived from theories of communicative competence reflected in the work of Hymes (1972), Morrow (1977), Munby (1978), Wilkins (1976), Canale and Swain (1980) and others, and on the model of L2 proficiency proposed in the Year 1 Report of the Development of Bilingual Proficiency Project. The assumption underlying the Language categories is that instruction which gives differential attention to these areas of competence may affect language learning in a variety of ways.

With respect to *Other Topics*, an attempt was made to find a small number of superordinate categories to represent the potentially vast number of topics which can arise in conversation. We tentatively suggest a tripartite system, that is, topics of narrow, limited, and broad range of reference. Underlying this classification is a belief that the cognitive content of instruction may have an effect on L2 learning.

Topics of narrow range refer to the immediate classroom environment, and to stereotyped exchanges such as *Good morning* or *How are you?* which have phatic value but little conceptual content. Included in this category are routine classroom references like establishing the date, day of the week, what kind of weather it is, or the use of other information which is easily verifiable or recalled. Topics of limited range refer to information which goes slightly beyond the classroom while remaining conceptually limited. Examples would be routine social topics like movies, hobbies, and holidays; school topics including extracurricular activities; and topics which relate to the students' immediate personal and family affairs. Topics of broad range go well beyond the classroom and immediate family environment, and involve reference to controversial public issues, current world events, abstract ideas, and reflective personal information such as *What do you like about living in Toronto?* It is often the case that when such topics are under discussion ideas do not come automatically but require some degree of soul-searching and originality. Communicative theorists believe that more time should be spent promoting realistic broad-range discussions in the L2 classroom, rather than confining students to the predictable routines of model dialogues and structural drills.

The final category relating to content is *Topic Control*, that is, who selects the topic that is being talked about: the teacher, the student, or both? Second language programs differ widely with regard to the behaviours included in this category. It has frequently been pointed out, for example, that the audiolingual method constitutes a strong claim concerning the role of the teacher in L2 education. In the literature on communicative language teaching, on the other hand, the teacher is not seen as an authority figure or director of the student's work, but more as a counsellor, resource person and guide. In a communicative curriculum such as the one proposed by Breen and Candlin (1980) the teacher and the students are seen as *co-participants* and *joint negotiators* of the teaching process, and the students actively participate in the selection of materials, topics and tasks. It is hoped that a close observation of classes which differ in terms of topic control, together with an analysis of classroom treatment and learning outcomes, will enable us to throw some light on the question of what constitutes the most effective balance between teacher and student roles in L2 education.

Student modality. This section identifies the various skills which may be involved in a classroom activity. The focus is on the students, and the purpose is to discover whether they are listening, speaking, reading, or writing, or whether these skills are occurring in combination. A category *other* is included to cover such activities as drawing, modelling, acting, or arranging classroom displays. We anticipate that a differential focus on the various skills and their combinations may directly affect the development of particular aspects of the learner's L2 competence.

Materials. This parameter introduces categories to describe the materials used in connection with classroom activities. In addition to the type of materials involved (written, audio, visual) consideration is given to the original source or purpose of the materials, and to the way in which they are used. In the case of written or audio texts, we note whether they are minimal in length (captions, isolated sentences, word lists) or extended (stories, dialogues, connected paragraphs). The categories for materials are as follows:

1. *Type of materials*
   (a) Text
   (b) Audio
   (c) Visual
2. *Length of text*
   (a) Minimal
   (b) Extended
3. *Source/purpose of materials*
   (a) Pedagogic
   (b) Semi-pedagogic
   (c) Non-pedagogic
4. *Use of materials*
   (a) Highly controlled
   (b) Semi-controlled
   (c) Minimally controlled

The third category involves us in making a judgment about whether the materials were specifically designed for L2 teaching (that is, pedagogic), or whether they were originally intended for some other purpose (non-pedagogic). Frequently, materials from outside the school environment are adapted for instructional purposes, hence the need for an intermediate category. A real newspaper or magazine used in the classroom in its original form would be an example of real-world, non-pedagogic, or *other purpose* material. On the other hand, a simplified reader, or a textbook unit contrived to illustrate a particular grammatical point, would be an example of materials specifically designed to be used for L2 instruction. In between, there is a category of semi-pedagogic material which utilizes real-life objects and texts, but in a modified or simulated form. An example of this might be a series of pictures or headlines from real newspapers, presented in a textbook with accompanying captions and exercises, which make the material more appropriate for the needs of the L2 learner. Advocates of the communicative approach have claimed that *authentic* materials are essential in order to prepare students for the kinds of discourse they will encounter outside the classroom (Breen 1982, Brumfit 1981, Phillips and Shettlesworth 1975). One of the questions we would like to investigate is the way in which classrooms actually differ in the repertoire of materials used, and how the differences may affect the type of L2 abilities that students acquire.

The final category in this section refers to the way in which the materials are used, as distinct from the type of materials they are. The use of materials in the classroom may be highly controlled, semi-controlled, or minimally controlled. For example, consider three situations in which students are being asked comprehension questions based on a reading passage or picture. In the first situation the discourse may be highly controlled in that the questions and answers adhere quite closely to the text. In the second situation the discourse is semi-controlled, that is, it extends occasionally beyond the restrictions imposed by the textbook. In the third situation the textbook simply provides the starting-point, and the ensuing conversation ranges widely over a number of topics which emerge spontaneously from the contributions of the students. It has been suggested, as a general principle, that a

flexible treatment of materials, particularly texts, will enable students to develop their fluency, to "do many things which are not entirely predictable . . . but which will indicate that their natural language learning capacities are being exercised and encouraged" (Brumfit 1981: 48). This statement appears to be inherently plausible, but we need more information about specific degrees of control and the effects that they might have on learning outcomes.

Part B: Communicative Features

The second part of the COLT observation scheme consists of an analysis of the communicative features occurring within each activity. As in the case of the categories of Part A, the communicative features have been motivated by numerous discussions in the current literature concerning communicative competence, communicative language teaching, and first and second language acquisition. So far, the following seven communicative features have been isolated:

I. Use of target language
II. Information gap
III. Sustained speech
IV. Reaction to code or message
V. Incorporation of preceding utterances
VI. Discourse initiation
VII. Relative restriction of linguistic form

All the features are coded for teachers and students, with the exception of discourse initiation and relative restriction of linguistic form, which are coded for students only. A discussion of the seven features follows:

Use of target language. This communicative feature is designed to measure the extent to which the target language is used in the classroom. It is based upon the obvious assumption—not necessarily evident in all teaching methods—that in order for a second language to be acquired it must be used by the students. This feature is covered by two categories in the coding scheme: *L1* refers to use of the first language, and *L2* refers to use of the second, or target, language.

Information gap. This communicative feature refers to the extent to which the information requested and/or exchanged is unpredictable, that is, not known in advance. Theories about the nature of communication emphasize that a high degree of unpredictability is characteristic of natural language use (Breen and Candlin 1980, Morrow 1981, Widdowson 1978, Canale 1983). In other words, communication must have a purpose—the giving, receiving, or requesting of information. It is not surprising that if the information requested is already known in advance, as is often the case in L2 classrooms, the motivation to communicate tends to be rather weak.

Although studies of first language acquisition have shown that there is a high level of predictability in many interactions between caretakers and children in the early stages (MacLure and French 1981), the information gap increases rapidly as language proficiency develops. In contrast, it appears that many L2 classroom interactions, even at the intermediate and advanced levels, are marked by an absence of real information gap. Students may perceive very little reason to listen carefully or to think about what they are saying when the main purpose of the exercise is to

display their knowledge of grammar without consideration of the message being conveyed (cf. Mehan 1979). It follows, then, that one of the aims of communicative language teaching is to engage learners in activities where the message is reasonably unpredictable, in order to develop information processing skills in the target language from the earliest possible stage (cf. Johnson 1982).

The categories designed to capture this feature in the COLT scheme are the following:

1. *Requesting information*
   (a) Pseudo-requests (The speaker already possesses the information requested).
   (b) Genuine requests (The information requested is not known in advance).
2. *Giving information*
   (a) Relatively predictable (The message is easily anticipated in that there is a very limited range of information that can be given. In the case of responses, only one answer is possible semantically, although there may be different correct grammatical realizations).
   (b) Relatively unpredictable (The message is not easily anticipated in that there is a wide range of information that can be given. If a number of responses are possible, they provide different information).

Sustained speech. This communicative feature is intended to measure the extent to which speakers engage in extended discourse, or restrict their utterances to a minimal length of one sentence, clause or word. The rationale for this feature is primarily pedagogic. Although communication outside the classroom consists of minimal as well as sustained discourse, L2 classrooms often restrict the length of the learner's output to one sentence or less, and rarely provide opportunities for more extended speech (McEwen 1976, Bialystok et al. 1979, Mitchell et al. 1981). If practice with normally sustained discourse is considered to be important for the development of fluent speaking and listening skills, then it is necessary for the teacher to create situations where such practice can take place. The categories designed to measure this feature are:

1. Ultra-minimal (utterances which consist of one word—coded for student speech only).
2. Minimal (utterances which consist of one clause or sentence—for the teacher, one-word utterances are coded as minimal).
3. Sustained speech (utterances which are longer than one sentence, or which consist of at least two main clauses).

Reaction to code or message. The fourth feature coded in Part B is closely related to the *content* parameter of Part A—the point at issue being whether the purpose of an exchange is to focus on the language code (that is, grammatical correctness) or on the message, or meaning, being conveyed. Research has shown that in first language acquisition attention is focused on the meaning rather than on the well-formedness of utterances (Snow and Ferguson 1977, de Villiers and de Villiers 1979, Wells 1981). Moreover, it appears that when children are acquiring their first language, correction of the code tends to confuse rather than help the learner (Brown 1980, McNeill 1966). In the L2 literature, it has been suggested that greater opportunities to focus

on meaning will help the learner approximate first language acquisition conditions, and may lead to similar success (Macnamara 1973). At present, this feature is covered by a single category, *Explicit code reaction,* defined as "A correction or other explicit statement which draws attention to the linguistic incorrectness of an utterance." Further categories may be added as a result of information obtained during the piloting of the observation scheme.

Incorporation of preceding utterances. In conversation there are many ways in which participants may react to each other's contributions. One person may add a comment, or elaborate on a preceding utterance. Another may ask a related question, or perhaps there may be no reaction at all. Some studies of first language acquisition have suggested that expansions of a child's utterance which add or request additional information and in which somewhat novel forms are used tend to enhance the development of the child's linguistic competence (Cross 1978, de Villiers and de Villiers 1979, Ellis and Wells 1980, Wells, Montgomery, and MacLure 1979, Wells 1981). Generally speaking, these studies suggest that "the best environment for learning language contains a rich variety of sentences closely tied to what the child currently produces" (de Villiers and de Villiers 1979: 109). It seems reasonable to suppose that the same principle may apply in L2 learning.

To allow coding for a limited selection of reactions to preceding utterances, six categories have been established. These are ordered according to their potential for stimulating further topic-related discourse, as follows:

1. *No incorporation:* No feedback or reaction is given.
2. *Repetition:* Full or partial repetition of previous utterance(s).
3. *Paraphrase:* Completion and/or reformulation of previous utterance(s).
4. *Comment:* Positive or negative comment (not correction) on previous utterance(s).
5. *Expansion:* Extension of the content of preceding utterance(s) through the addition of related information.
6. *Elaboration:* Requests for further information related to the subject matter of the preceding utterance(s).

Discourse initiation. In first language communication among adult speakers as well as between children and adults, interactants generally have equality in discourse roles and rights, that is, they may not only respond to elicitations but they may also spontaneously initiate talk. From an early age, children begin to engage in complex patterns of turn-taking behaviour. It has been noted that in many mother/child interactions it is the child who initiates the exchanges, and the mother—the *teacher* as it were—who responds (cf. MacLure and French 1981). These self-initiations are a gamble on the part of the child, an exploration of different linguistic means to negotiate meaning. Thus children create an opportunity to test their own hypotheses about the language by forcing their interactants to provide them with feedback and further input.

In many L2 classrooms the discourse roles of the learners might almost be regarded as the reverse of their counterparts outside the classroom. The classroom appears to be an environment which requires far more elicited than self-initiated talk, thus restricting the purposes for which language can be used. It follows that another principle of communicative language teaching is that students should be encouraged to initiate discourse themselves, instead of always having the role of responding to questions imposed on them. To measure the frequency of self-

initiated turns by students in different types of classrooms, the category *Discourse initiation* has been included in the coding scheme.

Relative restriction of linguistic form. In mother tongue communication, speakers use a wide variety of linguistic forms to express the meanings they wish to convey. Apart from sociolinguistic constraints imposed, for example, by the situation or by the relative status of the interactants, the grammatical structures and semantic choices are virtually unrestricted. The same lack of restriction is evident in the speech of children acquiring their first language. As indicated earlier, children experiment with language, try out their own strategies for communication and—as their systematic errors reveal—develop and test hypotheses about the language being learned. This constant process of meaning negotiation and hypothesis testing appears to be a crucial factor in first language acquisition.

By contrast, L2 learners are typically expected to mimic specific grammatical patterns in repetition or substitution drills, and are rarely encouraged to experiment or to use language freely. Often the fear is that creative, uncontrolled language use will lead to many errors which might then prove difficult to eradicate. The literature on communicative language teaching emphasizes the need for activities in which learners can practice getting a message across with whatever resources happen to be available, thus developing the type of skill which is referred to as *strategic competence* (Canale and Swain 1980). As in mother tongue acquisition, errors are viewed positively, and are considered to be a necessary step in the active process of hypothesis formation and gradual approximation to the target language: "The student must be allowed to grope, to play around with the language, to internalize it by using it and in using it to make mistakes" (Brumfit 1981:49). As with all the communicative features, however, it remains an empirical question what techniques are pedagogically most effective in a given classroom.

To permit an investigation of the effect of different degrees of restriction on the development of L2 proficiency, three subcategories have been proposed:

1. *Restricted use:* The production or manipulation of one specific form is expected, as in a transformation or substitution drill.
2. *Limited restriction:* There is a choice of more than one linguistic form but the range is very narrow, e.g. responses to Yes/No questions, statements about the date, time of day, etc.
3. *Unrestricted use:* There is no expectation of any particular linguistic form, as in free conversation, oral reports, or personal diary writing.

CODING PROCEDURES

Two sets of coding procedures have been developed: one for the activity level analysis (Part A) and one for the exchange level analysis (Part B).

All coding in Part A is done in real time by two observers who are present in the classroom during the observation period. The activities are timed, and the starting time for each activity is entered in the left-hand margin of the coding form. In addition to a written description of the type of activity (for example, drill, dialogue repetition, conversation), the observers place a check mark in the appropriate boxes under each of the four major headings: participant organization, content, student modality, and materials. In the course of a single activity, several subsections may be marked. For example, under the category *participant organization* there may be instances of student-to-student interaction, teacher-to-student interaction, and

teacher-to-class interaction. In cases like this, check marks are placed in the appropriate boxes for each of these participant interaction types, and a circle is drawn round the check mark in the box which represents the primary focus or predominant feature of the activity. This procedure is followed when coding all the Part A categories.

Part B coding is performed subsequent to the lesson, and is based on an audio-recording of each of the classes observed. A time-sampling procedure within activity types is followed. Coding starts at the beginning of each activity for one minute and is resumed after a two-minute interval. During the one-minute coding periods, the frequency of occurrence of each sub-category of the communicative features is recorded by two coders. For an example of how the coding is performed, consider the following interaction between a teacher and two students which occurred within a one-minute coding period:

Utterance	Communicative features
T: What's the date today?	L2/pseudo-request/minimal speech
S_1: April 15th.	L2/predictable information/ultraminimal speech/limited form
T: Good.	L2/comment/minimal speech
T: What's the date today?	L2/pseudo-request/minimal speech
S_2: April 15th.	L2/predictable information/ultraminimal speech/limited form
T: Good.	L2/comment/minimal speech

Consider now the following interaction between a teacher and a student which required a different set of codes:

Utterance	Communicative features
T: What did you do on the weekend?	L2/genuine request/minimal speech
S: I went to see a movie.	L2/giving unpredictable information/minimal speech/unrestricted form
T: That's interesting. What did you see?	L2/comment/elaboration (genuine request for information)/sustained speech
S: E.T. I really liked it. He's so cute.	L2/giving unpredictable information/sustained speech/unrestricted form
T: Yes, I saw it too and really liked it. Did anyone else see it?	L2/comment/expansion/elaboration (genuine request for information)/sustained speech.

It will readily be seen that the first example represents a stereotyped routine marked by pseudo-requests, predictable responses, and minimal speech patterns, while the second is much closer to natural language behaviour, and includes genuine requests, unpredictable responses, and a reasonable amount of sustained speech.

The intention is that the coding procedures for Part A and Part B should permit the investigators to provide a detailed description of the type of activities that are taking place in L2 classes, together with a characterization of these activities in terms of a wide range of linguistic-communicative and pedagogic factors that are thought to influence L2 learning.

A final comment regarding the reliability of the coding procedures is necessary before we discuss some of the data. We have already mentioned that there are both high and low inference categories in this scheme. However, the majority of our categories, particularly in Part B, are of the high inference type. One criticism that has been raised with respect to the use of such categories is that they involve a high degree of subjective judgement on the part of the coder. While this has to be admitted, it is also the case that many of the most interesting aspects of language learning are not directly observable. One way of compensating for the lack of objective criteria inherent in the use of high inference categories is to ensure that high levels of inter-observer reliability are obtained. Although reliability will not be statistically calculated until the pilot phase is completed, it appears so far that we have been able to achieve high levels of agreement for both Part A and Part B of the coding scheme.

REPORT ON SOME PRELIMINARY DATA ANALYSIS

During the development of the observation scheme we were able to collect and partially analyze some observational data from French (FSL) and English as a second language (ESL) classes at two different grade levels, and these are the data that we will be discussing in the present section.

The pre-pilot data come from one class of adult ESL learners and one class of adolescent (grade 6) FSL learners. We selected these two classes because they had been described as representing two distinct approaches to L2 instruction. The FSL class reflected a more traditional structure-based approach to L2 teaching (that is, the audiolingual method) and the ESL class represented a communicative approach. Because learners in these classes differed in terms of age, language of instruction, motivation for learning the L2, time spent in the classroom, and native language background, it would not be possible to make direct comparisons between the groups regarding the relationship between instructional input and learning outcomes. The value of looking at these two classes at this particular stage in our research was to determine whether the observation scheme was capable of describing features of interactional behaviour in two classes which were thought to represent two distinct approaches to L2 instruction, and furthermore, whether it was able to specify in precise terms what those differences might be.

When we compare the features coded for Part A in both classes, we find that there were both similarities and differences. The participant organization in both classes was primarily teacher-centered, although there were some instances of student-to-student interaction in each class. The content in both classes consisted primarily of a focus on language. However, the FSL class focussed primarily on the formal features of the target language (particularly vocabulary and pronunciation), while the ESL class covered instruction not only of the formal features, but also of some discourse and sociolinguistic features. In terms of the range of reference in subject matter, the FSL class tended to be limited in range, whereas the ESL class had instances of both limited and broad ranges of reference. The student modality for each class covered listening, speaking, and reading, with writing receiving limited attention during the time observed in the FSL class, and no time during the observational period in the ESL class. The materials were primarily pedagogic in both classes, but the use of materials in the ESL class ranged from highly controlled to minimally controlled, while the use of materials in the FSL class was highly controlled throughout the observation period.

In summarizing the results of the activity level analysis, it would appear that although there were some differences, they were quite minimal. If we look at the exchange level of analysis, however, some interesting differences both in terms of teachers' verbal input and learners' verbal output begin to emerge.

In terms of the first communicative feature, L2 use, the target language was used all the time by teachers and students in both classes, with the exception of one or two utterances in the first language in the FSL class. In terms of the second communicative feature, information gap, the FSL teacher asked primarily pseudo-questions and students gave only predictable responses, thus making the information gap very narrow in this class. In the ESL class, however, there was a great deal of giving of unpredictable information on the part of the teacher, as well as the use of both genuine and pseudo-requests. Also, students in this class gave both predictable and unpredictable responses (particularly in the last few minutes of coding), thus making the information gap between students and teacher somewhat wider. When looking at the instances of sustained speech, we were able to see that the FSL teacher's speech was minimal most of the time, consisting of no more than one phrase or sentence in each exchange, and the students' output was either minimal or ultra-minimal, consisting of no more than one word or sentence in each exchange. In the ESL class the teacher's speech was primarily sustained and the students' speech varied between sustained and minimal, although it was primarily minimal. Both teachers reacted to the code in these classes, although the tendency to react to meaning became more of a focus later in the ESL class. Reaction to code or message on the part of students was not evident in either class, although later in the ESL class there were clear examples of students reacting to message rather than to form in conversational interaction.

Turning to the incorporation of utterances, we found that in the FSL class there were no elaborations on the part of the teacher, whose reactions consisted primarily of comments and repetitions. In the ESL class, however, elaborations and expansions were far more numerous than repetitions, paraphrases, and comments. Elaborations did not occur on the part of students in either class during the coding period, although there were also instances of this later on in the ESL class. The categories concerning the extent to which students were restricted in their use of linguistic forms revealed that while the FSL learners were restricted at all times, the ESL learners, although restricted in some cases, also produced language which was both limited and unrestricted in terms of form. The discourse initiation category revealed that although no students in the FSL class spoke unless asked a question by the teacher, there were some instances of spontaneous self-initiations on the part of students in the ESL class. These self-initiations increased as the class continued beyond the coding period.

To summarize, it would appear that even with data that represent only one and a half hours of coding, differences are beginning to emerge between these two classes at the exchange level of analysis. The teachers' input in the ESL class appears to be more varied, containing a higher level of information gap, more instances of sustained speech, and a greater number of expansions and elaborations than the FSL teacher's speech. Similarly, the students' output in the ESL class appears to be more varied, containing fewer restrictions in terms of form, a higher level of information gap, and more instances of sustained speech than the FSL data. It should be emphasized that the aim of the pre-pilot phase was to test the ability of the

observation scheme to differentiate between various methodological approaches. It was not part of our purpose at this stage to draw conclusions about the value of one method rather than another. In particular, it is not possible to evaluate the various approaches to ESL and FSL instruction without reference to a variety of sociological and administrative factors which it is not our intention to discuss in the present paper.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have described a classroom observation scheme, currently being developed in the Modern Language Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which incorporates an activity level and an exchange level of analysis and which provides a framework for comparing various features of classroom discourse with patterns of natural language use outside the classroom. It is hoped that the COLT scheme will enable us to clarify a number of issues which relate to the current debate concerning the respective advantages of more innovative *communicative* approaches versus more traditional structure-based approaches to second language education.

Since it was not possible to define communicative language teaching in general global terms we compiled a list of indicators of communication, each of which can be separately observed and quantified. The communicative orientation of classrooms is therefore not characterized by a single feature, but by a cluster of interrelated dimensions. A combination of scores for the various categories will enable us to place each class at some point on a communicative continuum or scale. It is hypothesized that different types of communicative orientation will differently affect the development of proficiency in a second language. We must emphasize, however, that we are making no claim at this stage about what type of communicative orientation might be pedagogically most expedient in a given instructional setting.

We have described the categories of the observation scheme and discussed a preliminary data analysis. This analysis suggests that the COLT scheme is capable of revealing significant differences in communicative orientation between French and English as second language classes at two different grade levels. However, more data from a large number of classes is required to ensure that the COLT scheme can effectively describe instructional differences in a variety of L2 programs. For this reason, a pilot study was recently undertaken in a number of second language classes in the Toronto area. The sample includes 12 classes at the grade seven level, broken down as follows: 4 core French classes, 2 extended French classes, 2 French immersion classes, and 4 English as a second language classes.[2] All the classes have been observed twice, and analysis is being carried out at the activity and exchange

[2] *Core French* is the basic regular French program, in which French language is the subject of instruction. In Ontario, French is compulsory up to grade 9. The starting grade and the amount of instruction vary. On the average, students start between grades 4 to 5 with 40 minutes a day. In Toronto, students now start in grade 4 with 40 minutes a day.

Extended French involves the teaching of one or more other school subjects through the medium of French in addition to core French instruction.

In *French immersion* programs French is the language of instruction in all subject matter classes. At the primary level, the programs typically involve a half day of immersion in kindergarten followed by one or more years of total French instruction. At the earliest in grade 2, a daily period of English language arts is introduced, by grade 4 or 5 the proportion of the day in English may be increased to 50%.

levels. The pilot phase will provide the investigators not only with a larger data base, but also with data from classes of learners who are all of the same age, and who are learning a second language in a variety of instructional settings.

Once the pilot data are analyzed, it will be possible to begin the next phase of the research in which we intend to compare classes which differ significantly in terms of their activity level and exchange level characteristics. A number of classes of each type will be observed, and students will be given proficiency tests which are being developed concurrently with the observation scheme. Analysis of the test results will then be carried out to determine the relationship between type of instruction and proficiency in various aspects of second language skills.

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APPENDIX 1

Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT): Part A

SCHOOL
TEACHER
SUBJECT

GRADE(S)
LESSON (Minutes)

DATE
OBSERVER

Col 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
TIME	ACTIVITIES	PARTIC ORGANIZATION							MAN		LANGUAGE					CONTENT														TOPIC CONTROL			STUDENT MODALITY					MATERIALS								
		Class			Group		Comb									OTHER TOPICS																						Type						Use		
																NARROW				LIMITED					BROAD																						
		T to C	S to C	Choral	Same	Different	Individual	Gr Ind	Procedure	Discipline	Form	Function	Discourse	Sociolog		Classroom	Stereotyp	Pers Bio	Other	Personal	Rout Soc	Fam Com	School T	Other	Abstract	Pers Ref	Imagination	World T	Other	Teacher	Teacher Stud	Student	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Other	Minimal	Extended	Audio	Visual	Pedagogic	Semi-Pedag	Non-Pedag	High Control	Semi Control	Min Control

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APPENDIX 2 Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT): Part B

TEACHER VERBAL INTERACTION

COMMUNIC FEATURES		TARGET LANG		INFORMATION GAP				SUST SPEECH		REACTION CO MES	INCORPORATION of S UTTERANCES					
				Giving Info		Request Info										
No talk	Off-task	L_1	L_2	Predict	Unpred	Pseudo	Genuine	Minimal	Sustained	Explicit Code Reaction	No Incorp	Repetition	Paraphrase	Comment	Expansion	Elaboration

STUDENT VERBAL INTERACTION

	TARGET LANG			INFORMATION GAP				SUST SPEECH			FORM RESTR			REACTION CO MES	INCORPORATION of S T UTTERANCES					
				Giving Info		Request Info														
Choral	L_1	L_2	Disc.-Initiation	Pred	Unpred	Pseudo	Genuine	Ultraminimal	Minimal	Sustained	Restricted	Limited	Unrestricted	Explicit Code Reaction	No Incorp	Repetition	Paraphrase	Comment	Expansion	Elaboration

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